

Victim Compensation Connection

A bimonthly publication
of the California Victim
Compensation Program

June 2007

California's Victim Compensation Program Focused on Positive Change, Customer Service

From the Desk of Karen McGagin, Executive Officer

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*Helping California Crime
Victims Since 1965*

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California's Victim Compensation Program is on the move.

On the move means the California Victim Compensation Program (VCP) is taking on challenges and working in several key areas to better serve victims of violent crime.

One of the many important developments was the recent launch of a dedicated Customer Service Section that will improve our connection with crime victims, their representatives, victim advocates, service providers and the public. This customer service resource is equipped with upgraded phone technology, expanded staff and experienced new management.

Compensation payments are up significantly over last year. VCP statistics for the first three quarters of the 2006-07 fiscal year show payments are up more than 20 percent compared to the same period the previous year, totaling more than \$55 million. The program also received more than 37,600 applications, which is a 9 percent increase for the same time period.

The upward trend in payments and applications indicates the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board's move to enhance benefits and expand access to care is succeeding. Among other steps taken in 2006, the Board increased the availability of mental health services, established dental treatment preauthorization/pre-approval, and raised the compensation cap for funeral and burial expenses.

Though payments to crime victims are up, the VCP continues on a healthy fiscal track, focused on stable funding and maintaining a prudent budget reserve. This stable foundation is due in part to our successful partnerships with counties and other state agencies to collect court-ordered restitution payments from criminal offenders.

Statistics also show the VCP has reduced the average processing time for victim compensation applications compared to the prior fiscal year. Under normal circumstances, this would be a positive trend, but it is even more meaningful when you consider the program is effectively operating dual computer systems as it transitions from the old VOX mainframe system to the new CaRES web-based automated claims processing system.

The National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards held its Western Regional Conference in San Diego this spring and got a first-hand look at California's program. They like where we're headed, too. I'd like to thank the association for publishing positive articles about the conference and the VCP in the association's latest newsletter.

You'll find more about the VCP's positive moves inside this June 2007 Victim Compensation Connection Newsletter.



County Pilot Project Phase Extended To Pack More Features Into CaRES

Victim Compensation Program staff at three county Joint Powers (JP) Verification Units – in Sacramento, San Joaquin and San Bernardino County – have been using the new CaRES automated claims processing system in pilot projects since April.

The feedback from these county pilot pioneers has assisted with evaluating the system, working out bugs and setting development priorities for the high-tech, paperless system used to manage the delivery of Victim Compensation Program services to victims of violent crime.

“What we’re hearing from our county partners is consistent with our experience with the CaRES system here at VCP headquarters,” said Jim Brown, Project Manager. “We’ve determined it’s best to extend the pilot phase and incorporate planned customer-service, productivity and performance upgrades before we deploy the system to additional counties.”

The planned upgrades include:

- An overall summary screen that allows users to quickly review highlights of a claim’s status, eliminating the need to manually explore the system for summary data.
- A summary screen that provides a global look at benefit determination status.
- Additional customized letters and improved ability to manage correspondence with applicants and providers.
- Enhanced document capture and document management systems that convert paper documents to digital images.

- New server hardware and software to improve system performance.
- A user administration console to enhance management of workflow and user access.
- Appeals scheduling and correspondence.
- Expedited processing for emergency awards.
- Criminal Disposition Tracking.

The VCGCB will be providing wide-screen computer display monitors for local county CaRES users who need the upgraded hardware. The wide-screen display allows users to simultaneously view CaRES,

documents related to the claim, and even VOX information as needed.

The Web-based CaRES system will not only replace the predecessor VOX computer system and enable the conversion

to paperless document management, it will support a more efficient and flexible workflow and create a concise electronic record for each claim. Users focus on various phases of the process, including application intake, eligibility determination, benefit determination and provider payment processing.

“CaRES is very efficient. You can move quickly from entering an application to determining eligibility to paying a bill,” says Vickie Wagner, supervisor at the San Bernardino County JP unit, which is testing the system in a large-county environment. “It’s great to have all the documents available right there on the screen and not have to worry about a paper file.”

CaRES is designed to meet the future needs of the VCP, crime victims and the California victim-services community by providing accurate, efficient and secure victim compensation claims processing and restitution information tracking.



New Applications Take 'Byte' Out of Bad Data

Computer experts refer to "garbage in, garbage out" when pointing out how a computer system's finished product is only as good as the quality of the data going in. However the Victim Compensation Program (VCP's) new CaRES automated claims processing system is designed to accurately and efficiently serve crime victims, from the time they first apply all the way through the final disposition of their claim.

To do its job, CaRES needs good data, right from the start. For crime victims and their support network, the critical first step in the process is the "Application for Crime Victim Compensation."

The VCP is phasing in two new versions of the application that are designed to deliver quality data to CaRES. Both are all-in-one forms that can be used by all applicants: direct victims, family members and/or parents/guardians.

Application Completed Online

One version of the new VCP applications will be available online and filled out via computer using free and widely available Adobe Reader software. This "LiveCycle" version places all data into text fields in the form and also into bar codes within the form.

After the form is printed, signed by the applicant and faxed or scanned into CaRES, the computer system scans the bar codes to bring all form data directly and accurately into CaRES.

The new online form combines the advantages of a paper form and 100 percent digital accuracy. The user can print the paper form and keep a paper copy for their files.

The automated transfer of form data is significantly faster and more accurate than manual key entry of form data.

The "LiveCycle" application will first be tested in English. It will later be available online in separate English and Spanish versions. The "LiveCycle" application has only five pages.

Application Filled Out By Hand

For applicants without access to a computer and the Internet, or those who prefer to fill out an application by hand, the new "OCR/ICR" version of the form utilizes text boxes for individual letters wherever possible.

The text boxes keep hand-printed letters and numbers constrained to the best size and location for "Optical Character Recognition" and "Intelligent Character Recognition" software to read form text, after the application is scanned or faxed into the VCP computer system.

The form allows more efficient entry of form data into CaRES, compared to manual key entry, though VCP staff will still be required to verify scanned data and complete the entry of data manually as needed.

CaRES will continue to handle older versions of the VCP application by manually entering the data into the system.

The image shows a sample of the 'Application For Crime Victim Compensation' form. A blue oval highlights a large barcode at the bottom of the form, which is used for automated data transfer. The form includes sections for applicant information, relationship to victim, and contact details.

In the new "LiveCycle" version of the form, information entered into the form is automatically duplicated in a bar code that can then be scanned for data transfer.

Customer Service Takes Center Stage

The Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board is developing its Customer Call Center into a full-service Customer Service Section. The change will help us better meet the needs of victims of violent crime and the organizations, agencies and licensed care providers that deliver services to them.

Focus on People and Technology

Three key advances make the Customer Service Section a full-service resource:

- The addition of extra trained claims-processing staff with access to critical claims information made readily available through the new CaRES claims management system.
- The CaRES system itself, which holds a complete, up-to-date record of each Victim Compensation Program claim and provides customer service staff with the information they need.
- Call-routing technology that connects customers with the assistance that best fits their needs. Callers use the phone system to indicate their preferences, which gives them a head start on getting assistance. The new customer service phone system is also designed to minimize call waiting time.

"Customer service is our top priority," said Karen McGagin, VCGCB Executive Officer. "The goal is to successfully resolve as many inquiries as possible on the spot with a 'one-call-and-done' philosophy."

Assistance for Victims, Service Providers, Advocates and the General Public

Customer service representatives provide important information to our customers throughout the processing of claims, including assisting callers with questions regarding program eligibility, the status of bills, appeal options, and other complex issues.

Our Customer Service Section assists a variety of customers, including:

- Victims of violent crime who want to learn more about the Victim Compensation Program, file an application, or contact a local Victim/Witness Assistance Center.
- Parents or guardians of victims.
- Non-English speaking victims; Spanish-speaking available to assist callers who indicate this preference in the system, while other languages are accommodated through a translation service.
- County Victim/Witness Assistance Center advocates.
- Providers of medical, dental, mental health and other services to victims.
- Members of the public with general inquiries.

Online Resources Support Our Customers

Helpful information for crime victims and victim service providers is available on the VCGCB website. Customers can find details on the Victim Compensation Program, including answers to frequently asked questions on eligibility and coverage.

Victim service providers can use the "Application/Bill Status Request Form" provided through the VCGCB website, which they can complete online to conveniently request the status of applications or bills that have been submitted to the program.

To access the form and additional customer service resources, go to www.victimcompensation.ca.gov.

How to Contact Customer Service

If you need assistance:

- By phone, call customer service toll-free at **(800) 777-9229**.
- For customers who prefer to contact the VCGCB by e-mail, please send inquiries to info@vcgcb.ca.gov.

The California Crime Victim Assistance Association Coordinates Services, Supports Victims' Rights

The California Crime Victim Assistance Association (CCVAA) provides a statewide forum for the coordination of crime victims' rights and services, and serves as a unified voice for California Victim/Witness Program Coordinators.

At its recent meeting June 5-6 in Sacramento, the CCVAA received an update from the VCGCB on several topics, including progress on rolling out the new CaRES automated claims processing system to the counties, highlights of recent conferences, and customer service initiatives. The association also discussed issues regarding legislation, policy and funding, and other topics of interest to Victim/Witness program staff statewide.

Formerly known as the California Victim Witness Coordinating Council, the CCVAA recently changed its name to better define its work developing and advancing the field of victim services in California. Its predecessor council was established in 1978, incorporated as a non-profit agency in 1982, and is among the oldest organizations representing crime victim assistance programs in the nation.

CCVAA membership includes Victim/Witness coordinators from every California county, including staff from Victim/Witness programs that serve as Joint Powers (JP) Verification Units for the Victim Compensation Program, and staff from non-JP counties.

Educational Opportunities for Advocates Featured at North American Victim Assistance Conference

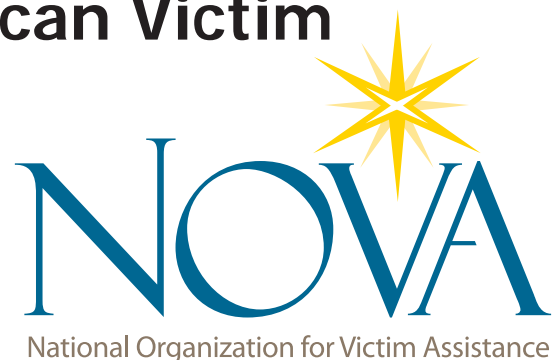
Reno, Nevada will be the site of the 33rd Annual North American Victim Assistance Conference, "Programs & Partnerships: A Winning Combination," sponsored by the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA).

The July 22-27 conference will focus on enhancing relationships with traditional and non-traditional partners. It will feature educational opportunities for beginning, intermediate and advanced advocates.

The non-profit NOVA is composed of victim and Victim/Witness assistance programs and professionals, criminal justice agencies, mental health professionals, researchers, former victims and

survivors, and others committed to increasing recognition and implementation of victim rights and services.

According to NOVA, the Annual Conference is one way to ensure continuing growth in the field of victim rights and services. For more information, please visit www.trynova.org or call (703) 535-NOVA.



CONFERENCE CONNECTIONS

The VCGCB participates in conferences throughout the year as part of its ongoing outreach to victims' service providers:

California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists

The VCGCB joined more than 1,000 mental health service providers and other attendees at the 43rd annual California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists Conference in Santa Clara.

The mid-May conference was an opportunity for the VCGCB to provide information to marriage and family therapists, who are among the licensed mental health service providers treating victims of violent crime. Other such professionals include psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, and mental health nurses.

The Victim Compensation Program can provide compensation benefits to victims who are in need of mental health services to help them recover from the trauma of violent crime. Total payments by the Victim Compensation Program for mental health services are second only to payments for medical services, and the program processes more bills for mental health services than any other type of bill.

For additional information on marriage and family therapists, see the association's website at www.camft.org. For more information on victim compensation benefits for mental health services, go to www.victimcompensation.ca.gov.

American College of Emergency Physicians, California Chapter

The American College of Emergency Physicians, State Chapter of California (CAL/ACEP) 36th annual Scientific Assembly and Annual EMS Administrators Conference was an opportunity for VCGCB to connect with medical professionals who frequently provide assistance to victims of violent crime.

Attendees included physicians, nurses and pre-hospital emergency care providers. The VCGCB exhibit drew numerous inquiries about the Victim Compensation Program and informed many of the benefits available for victims.

Held in late May in Newport Beach, the conference featured a Scientific Assembly Program with nationally and internationally known speakers who addressed topics such as renal failure, meningitis/encephalitis, toxicology, eye emergencies and other important medical issues.

The program is designed to help emergency physicians, physician assistants and nurses stay current and gain new insights in to the clinical and practice aspects of emergency medicine. Visit CAL/ACEP's website www.calacep.org for more information.

National Association of Social Workers

Staff from the Mental Health Section of the Victim Compensation Program represented the VCGCB at the National Association of Social Workers Annual Conference, "Envisioning the Future: Working for Change," in San Francisco.

Many attendees of the conference in early May were new therapists who had yet to work with victims of violent crime or the Victim Compensation Program, so the event was an opportunity to answer their ques-

tions and provide them with Victim/Witness Assistance Center contact information.

The conference provided professional development and continuing education credits, classes for licensed and non-licensed professionals as well as networking opportunities and a special Social Work Awards Luncheon.

For more information, visit the National Association of Social Workers Website at www.naswca.org.